



*American Academy of Forensic Sciences
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors
International Association for Identification
National Association of Medical Examiners
Society of Forensic Toxicologists/ American Board of Forensic Toxicology*

July 6, 2021

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

You have rightly focused on the increase in gun violence in the United States and have taken several steps to reduce it. We applaud your efforts, such as expanding the availability of ATF's National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) correlation center. However, NIBIN is not the end product, it is merely a lead for law enforcement. It takes a trained, qualified, and skilled firearms/toolmark examiner to personally compare the bullets and fired casings from crime scenes with known evidence from a suspect. The formidable increase in homicides by firearms, drive-by shootings, and random violence has severely stressed our nation's forensic crime laboratories. The backlog of firearms cases in local, county, state, tribal, and federal crime laboratories is increasing, leaving criminals on the street longer and victims agonizingly waiting for justice. And each firearms case also involves additional forensic analysis besides the analysis of the weapon and comparison of bullets and shell casings. ATF, for example, in its FY22 budget request has asked for funding for DNA analysis on shell casings. In all, homicides involve a myriad of necessary forensic disciplines such as DNA and latent print analysis to enable successful prosecutions.

Unfortunately, while there has been this increase of gun violence and a significant increase in forensic firearms evidence submissions to the nation's crime labs, there has been an alarming decrease in the number of trained forensic firearms examiners. As a result, local, county, state, and tribal crime laboratories cannot keep up with the upsurge of new cases and influx of firearms submitted for examination. Backlogs of evidence items to exam have increased dramatically. For example, the South Carolina State Forensic Services Laboratory has reported a 28% increase in the number of firearms cases and a 31% increase in submitted items. Backlogs exist or are being created in many state and local laboratories, such as Rhode Island where their backlog of these cases has risen from zero to 288 cases in one year. The backlog for the New York State Crime Lab increased by 900 cases in one year, and in the last nine months San Francisco's backlog of firearms cases rose 50%. Most other states have the same issues. These backlogs bog down criminal investigations and prosecutions, depriving victims of the justice they deserve.

The decrease in trained firearms examiners can be attributed to examiner retirements and the inability to train enough examiners to replace them. The problem is exacerbated by labs adding new positions to address backlogs and increased evidence submissions. Laboratory openings for forensic firearms examiners far exceed the available trained workforce. Laboratories that need to hire full-time firearms analysts cannot find trained applicants. When they resort to hiring an entry level employee, the laboratory must train that person for several years, which in turn takes the experienced examiner off the bench, adding to the backlog of cases. This problem can only be solved with a national workforce initiative of more trained and competent firearms and toolmark examiners. Training an analyst in firearms analysis is a time consuming and labor intensive apprenticeship process. While the ATF has a well-recognized, nationally known training course for new firearms examiners, called the National Firearms Examiner Academy (NFEA), the Academy can only train 12 examiners a year. The national demand for new examiners greatly surpasses the current ATF training capacity. Expanding this program would significantly help reduce the shortage of examiners and reduce the backlog of firearms cases.

The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO) thecfso.org would like to work with you to achieve your goals in a way that attains timely and fair justice. That will require solving the capacity issues in publically funded crime laboratories. We would like to request a meeting with your office to discuss the ramifications of the increase in violence on the nation's forensic science community.

Our point of contact to set up a meeting is Beth Lavach, bethlavach@elsandassociates.com, 703-622-8752

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